DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 135 740 SP 010 791

AUTHOR Yeager, Charles M.
TITLE The Black Child's Self-Concept Within the School Context.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 31p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Economic Status; Family Background; Fatherless Family; Human Dignity; *Integration Effects; *Negro Students; Public Schools; *Racial Integration; School Integration; *Self Concept; *Self Evaluation; *Student Teacher Relationship

ABSTRACT

This study reports on some educational aspects of the black child's self-concept. The data support a view that there is a statistically significant correlation between the child's self-concept and the teacher's view of him. It also indicates that father absence is more dysfunctional to children born in the North than the South and that school Socio-Economic-Status (SES) is related to the child's self-view. Issues raised for further research are: (1) Is age more important than achievement relative to classmates in determining self-concept? (2) Is it the SES and racial composition of the school or the change in the child's experience of these two variables that has the greatest effect on the child? And (3) If integration depresses self-evaluation, will a period of time in a consistently integrated setting neutralize this effect? Appendixes contain graphs illustrating differences between the child's evaluation of himself and the evaluation of his teacher in varying contexts. A bibliography is attached. (Author/JD)

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THE BLACK CHILD'S SELF-CONCEPT WITHIN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Charles M. Yeager

The American public school has failed to provide the tools for a rapid integration of the black American into the political and economic structure. An analysis of the relationship between his teacher and the urban black child's self-concept and some of the background variables that may have affected this relationship, may help us to understand this crisis in public education.

The term self-concept denotes the extent to which an individual believes himself capable, worthy, significant, and successful. A child's self-concept results from his treatment as an object in his interactions with other individuals. The child must select and perform acts congruent with the other's views in order to maintain an on-going interaction. Although the child's actions to some degree shape the other's views, in this study we are measuring the constraint on his behavior of one factor over which the child has no control: his race.

Two factors influence the significant other's effect on the child: his authority over, and his affective bond with the child . If for no

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other reason than to maintain the on-going interaction, the child attempts to conform to the expectations of those with whom he feels a strong affective bond. And with a person who is in authority over him the child is encouraged to conform, at least outwardly, in order to minimize conflict. We have chosen the child's teacher as this study's significant other because of the teacher's great authority over him, and, in most cases, awareness of the child's strong affective bond with him.

The Sample. We chose the sixth grade for our study because it is generally the last educational year in which the backgrounds of both his peers and teachers, his teachers' orientation, as well as the size and bureaucratic functioning of his school, are all fairly uniform. The Boston Public School System made available for study in 1966 all coeducational schools with two or more sixth grade classrooms, containing five or more black students. Ninety-six students and their teachers' replies were obtained through a stratified random sample based on: (1) the principal's estimate of school SES, and (2) the school racial composition obtained from the school census.

The operational measure of the dependent variable, the self-concept, was the child's self-rating on a ten-item semantic differential scale. The child was asked to mark one of five positions between each pair of polar adjectives. (See Figure I of the Appendix.) The

teachers filled out the same semantic differential test except that the rating was based on their perception of the child .

Additional information was obtained from the child's cumulative record form because this was readily available to the teacher and probably helped structure her perceptions of the child. This form included the child's sex, age, IQ score, Fall third grade achievement scores, Fall sixth grade achievement scores, mean absences in the fourth and fifth grades, total number of years in the Boston Public Schools, and birthplace. Additionally, an interview with the mother indicated the child's number of residences since birth, and the family's economic level (based on father's occupation, father's educational level, and mother's occupation). For an analysis of the Semantic Differential Scale, and validation of the economic measure see Yeager (1970).

Analysis of the Data. The zero order correlation of the semantic differential scales of the teacher's perception of the child and the child's perception of himself was .243, which is statistically significant at below the .05 level. But people who have interacted over a long period of time could be expected to be in far greater agreement than the correlation indicated. A further analysis was obtained by tri-chotimizing the scales into high, medium and low responses. Then cross-tabulation of the teacher's and child's replies partitioned the original sample into nine separate categories.

For the background analysis the cases where child and teacher are in agreement on rating the child favorably are compared to those where they are in agreement on an unfavorable rating. Together these characteristics constituted about 31% of the sample. Table I in the Appendix summarizes the background characteristics of the children in these two cells.

The most important results of this comparison are:

1) No sex difference exists in the percentage of teachers and pupils with mutually higher and lower ratings, perhaps because the teacher evaluated all children on the same basis (universalism) and the criteria of evaluation (specificity) had nothing to do with sexual differences. Also, possibly, the fact that half of the teachers in the sample were male is significant. The nature of our sample of teachers, therefore, made it impossible to determine if teachers evaluate either same sex or opposite sex children more favorably. Further research with sample sizes large enough to control for more than one factor at once is needed to clarify this point.

2) Those with higher self-ratings came from homes where the mother occupied an educational level higher than the father's. However, it is impossible to make inferences for the fathers of the children with lower self-ratings because two-thirds of the data on this variable is missing, perhaps indicating father absence (See Yeager, 1970). However, for the third of the sample for which the data is available,

the responses are skewed so far to the high side for the father's educational level that their accuracy is questionable. Therefore, it is impossible to draw conclusions about parental educational dominance in the home.

3) In both cases when the teacher and child agreed in rating the child favorably or unfavorably, the child is more likely than in the overall sample average to have been born in the Greater Boston area (This is balanced by the greater number of children born outside of Boston which we discuss in the deviant case section). Again, this may be due to father absence. If so, it appears that father absent Northern families have disabilities which make the teacher view them with disfavor. This is not true for families migrating from the South in which, as Moynihan (1968) has indicated, father absence is less dysfunctional . The data support those who believe that there is an interaction effect between place of birth and father absence.

4) On the variable of IQ, those with lower self-ratings are an average of 15. 7 points below those with higher self-ratings, as expected. However, on two of the four achievement measures, those with lower self-ratings are above average for the entire sample, an apparent contradiction explained by the fact that IQ scores consider age, unlike achievement tests. Children with lower self-ratings are on the average one year older than those with higher self-ratings. Although test makers try to remove "out of school" influences from their

achievement tests, scores are at least partially influenced by the level of maturity of the individual being tested. Just living in the world outside the school gives the child information that will raise his achievement scores. Other background data indicate that those with lower self-ratings repeated an overage of 1.1 grades, whereas those with higher self-ratings repeated less than an average of 0.1 grades. The discrepency between achievement tests and IQ tests is explained, therefore, by the greater age of the children with low IQs and average achievement.

Illustrations 2 and 3 in the Appendix indicate the average academic grades in school and the average school percent black for those whose teacher agreed with their low ratings. It appears that both the child's grades and the degree of school racial integration influence these high or low ratings. Although academic marks and degree of integration are presented for each year, the teacher's and child's ratings are available for only the sixth year. It is not surprising that teacher and child ratings are positively correlated to grades because both of them filled out the questionaire in school. However, it appears, unexpectedly, that the higher the percentage of white students in the school the greater the chances that both teacher and child will rate the child high. Competition for black students would be expected to be greater and self-concept lower, therefore, in the integrated schools. Perhaps the difference in marks is due to the 13 point IQ advantage instead of

the school's racial composition. Another factor is probably school SES, which is examined in the deviant case section.

The Deviant Cases. Table II in the Appendix summarizes some of the most important characteristics of those children whose self-ratings deviated greatly from their teachers. Not only are there statistically significant differences of each group's replies, but the F test indicates that the distributions of each group's replies are different. Among the most salient characteristics are:

1) Children with high self-ratings were more likely to have been born in Boston and, therefore, to have spent more years in the Boston Public Schools. A consistent environment, therefore, was influential on the child's self-rating, but did not necessarily have a positive impact on the teacher's rating. The other variables may explain why.

2) Many factors are in greater agreement with the teacher's rating than with the child's self-rating. One is the child's academic marks during his six years in school (See Illustration 4 in the Appendix), which are positively related to the teacher's evaluation and negatively related to the child's self-rating. One would expect that the child's academic accomplishments are associated with his teacher's view of him, but it is somewhat surprising that poor school performance did not reduce his self-rating. Perhaps the children deliberately

misrepresented their replies to the questionaire, but it is also possible that the children adapted to their great dissatisfaction with school by denying the school's importance--particularly its most visible criteria of judgment. Denial would enable the child to maintain a satisfactory self-rating while he was in, what in many ways is, a hostile environment.

3) What factors account for a child's high self-rating despite his teacher's low evaluation? See Illustration 5 in the Appendix for the average school percentage black over the child's six years in school. We see that children with high self-ratings have spent five years in schools which are above the sample average in percentage of attending white children. However, we suggested previously that perhaps school SES, rather than school racial composition, was the more important factor influencing the child's self-rating. Illustration 6 shows the average socio-economic-status for the deviant groups in this section. We would expect that as the school's SES increases the child's overall self-rating would decrease because his social position relative to the other students would decrease. As indicated, those with higher self-ratings than their teacher's evaluation are now attending socio-economically lower schools than those with lower self-ratings. However, the diagram also indicates a significant change in school SES at the beginning of the fifth grade. It is possible, therefore, that the change in school SES rather than the present school SES accounts for the child's

self-rating. Because the children took the semantic differential scales only in the sixth grade, rather than each year, further research is needed to answer several important questions:

(1) Is it the present school SES as it relates to other schools and to the children attending them that accounts for the child's self-ratings in a specific school? (2) Does the degree of change in school SES during a child's schooling give him a perspective that accounts for his self-ratings? (3) Will consistency in school SES over time remove the impact of change in school SES on the child's self-rating? (4) Are the lower self-ratings of the children attending schools of higher SES more realistic and thus less anxiety-producing in terms of goals which they establish for the child?

Some Concluding Remarks: The value of this study was as much in the questions it raised as it was in the information it supplied.

The data supported a view that:

1. A statistically significant relationship exists between the teacher's view of the black child and the child's view of himself. However, this relationship was not strong enough to conclude that the best way to change the black child's view of himself is to change the teacher's view of him.

2. Father absence appeared to be more dysfunctional to the self-concept of the child born in the North, than to the child born in the South. This supported Moynihan's arguments (1968) that an interaction

effect takes place between father absence and place of birth.

3. Although ratings by the teacher and child were positively associated with IQ, no relation ship appeared between these ratings and the child's achievement scores because the children with lower IQ's were a year older, and age is considered in computing IQ scores but not in achievement scores.

4. As expected the child's IQ, achievement scores and academic marks were positively related to the teacher's rating. However, a significant number of black children maintained a favorable self-view despite poor school performance and the teacher's low view.

5. As expected, the higher the SES of the school, the lower the expected self-rating of the black child. Unfortunately, the SES was interrelated with other factors which made it impossible to conclude that SES alone was responsible.

Some of the questions raised by this study are:

1. Would automatic promotion be a preferable policy, since the black children with lower self-ratings were not significantly lower in achievement test scores than the overall sample average and were on the average a year older than the sample average? Is the child's age relative to his peers more important than his achievement relative to his peers in determining his self-concept?

2. Since many of the children with poor school performance maintained good self-views, what is the process of denying the judgment of the child's school and should this process be encouraged with children

of low ability?

3. Is the present school SES or present school racial balance more important in accounting for varying self-views than a change in these factors? The SES or racial balance of the school, generally assumed to be a determinant variable, may not be as important as the changes a child goes through in either one or both of these variables. The important factor relates to the child's experience, not to society's.

4. Finally, children with lower self-ratings often were integrated into schools with a greater percentage white at the beginning of the fifth grade. Undoubtedly, this finding will be used by some to argue against bussing, even though it may be a social class effect. But even if the lower ratings result from racial integration, those children had above average achievement scores and above average academic marks, despite their low ratings. Also, nothing indicates that the children's self-ratings will not bounce back after more years in the integrated setting.

The author hopes that this study will aid other investigators in developing an adequate research design that will eventually provide us with a further understanding of the development of the black child's self-concept.

APPENDIX

I THINK I AM

HAPPY:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:SAD

LAZY:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:HARD WORKING

MEAN:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:KIND

PROUD:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:NOT PROUD

SMART:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:STUPID

GOOD:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:BAD

UNSURE:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:SURE OF SELF

SUCCESSFUL:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:UNSUCCESSFUL

A GOOD STUDENT:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:NOT A GOOD STUDENT

LEADER:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:FOLLOWER

FIGURE 1

TABLE I

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR AGREEMENT BETWEEN RATING OF CHILD BY TEACHER AND SELF

Characteristic	High Ratings By Both N=16	Low Ratings By Both N=15	t test	F test
Percent Female	63	60		
Mean Age	10.9	11.9	.01	ns
Mean Intelligence Quotient	104.8	89.5	.01	ns
Mean Reading Grade (3rd Grade)	3.6	2.6	.20	ns
Mean Reading Grade (6th Grade)	5.6	4.7	.01	ns
Mean Word Meaning 6th Grade	6.5	5.3	.05	.05
Mean Absences Grades 4 & 5	8.9	13.6	.05	.05
Mean Years in Boston Schools	5.9	5.8	ns	.05
Percentage Black in 6th Grade	32	45		
Percentage Born in Boston	67	73		
Mean Number of Residences	4.0	4.1	ns	ns
Mean Economic Level	53.1	51.9	ns	ns
Mean Years of Mothers' Education	11.4	10.2	.10	ns
Mean Years of Fathers' Education	11.4	13.4[a]	.20	ns

[a] n=5

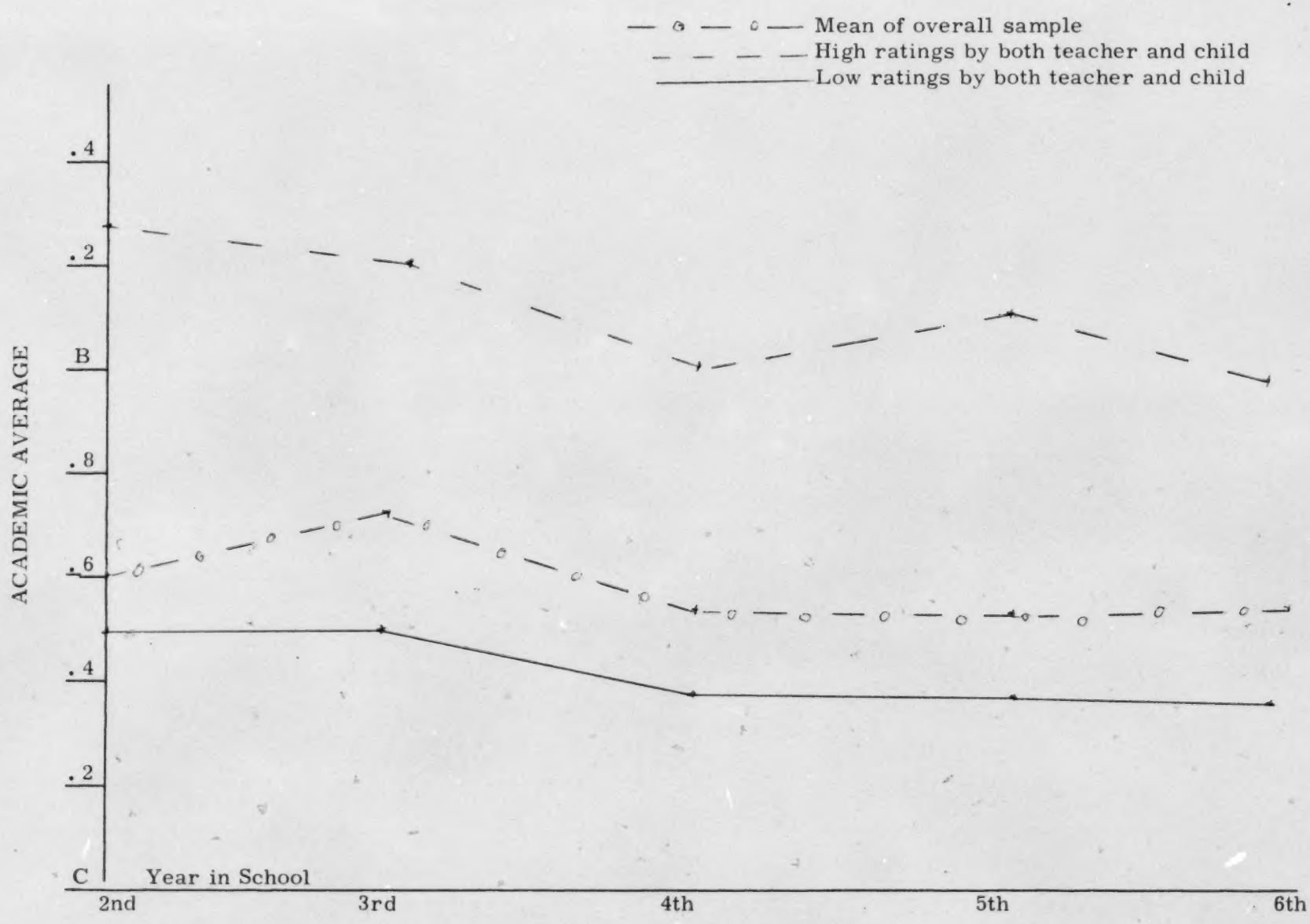

ILLUSTRATION 2: AVERAGE ACADEMIC MARKS FOR AGREEMENT IN RATINGS OF CHILD BY BOTH TEACHER AND SELF

TABLE II

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR DISAGREEMENT IN RATING OF CHILD BY TEACHER AND SELF

Characteristics	High Ratings Child Low Ratings Teach. N=11	Low Child Rat. High Teach Rat. N=9	t test	F test
Percent Female	55	67		
Mean Age	11.1	10.8	.20	.10
Mean Intelligence Quotient	90.8	103.8	.01	.05
Mean Reading Grade (3rd Grade)	2.5	2.9	ns	.10
Mean Reading Grade (6th Grade)	4.2	5.3	.01	.10
Mean Paragraph Meaning 6th Grade	4.3	5.9	.01	.05
Mean Word Meaning 6th Grade	4.8	6.2	.01	.10
Mean Absences Grades 4&5	16.1	5.6	.05	.05
Mean Years in Boston Schools	5.5	4.7	.20	ns
Percentage Black in 6th Grade	34	31		
Percentage Born in Boston	73	44		
Mean Number of Residences	4.9	5.1	ns	ns
Mean Economic Level	48.3	52.7	.20	.01
Mean Years of Mothers' Education	11.1	9.8	.05	ns
Mean Years of Fathers' Education	9.8	13.8	.01	ns

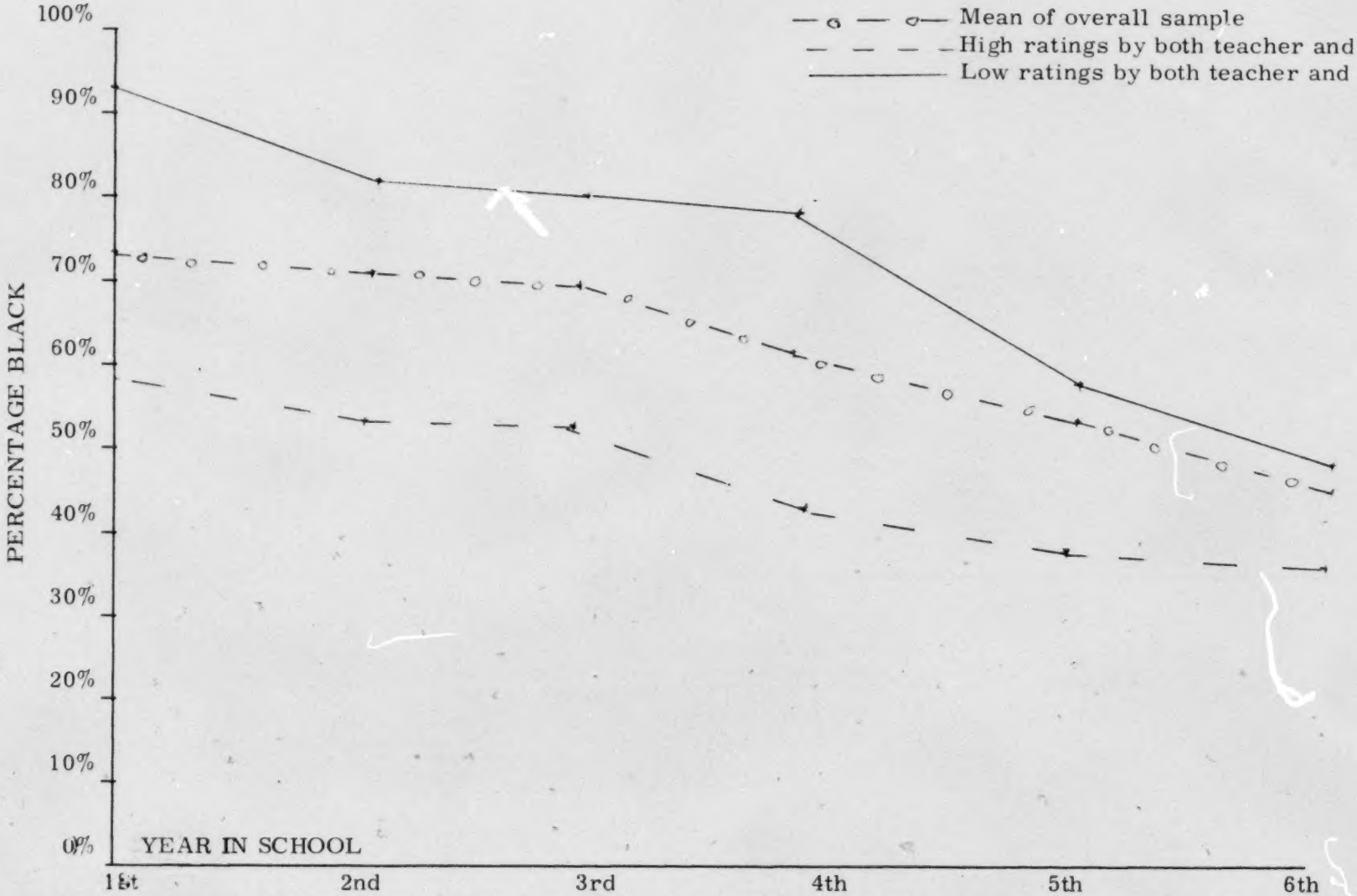

ILLUSTRATION 3: SCHOOL PERCENTAGE BLACK FOR AGREEMENT IN RATINGS OF THE CHILD BY TEACHER AND SELF

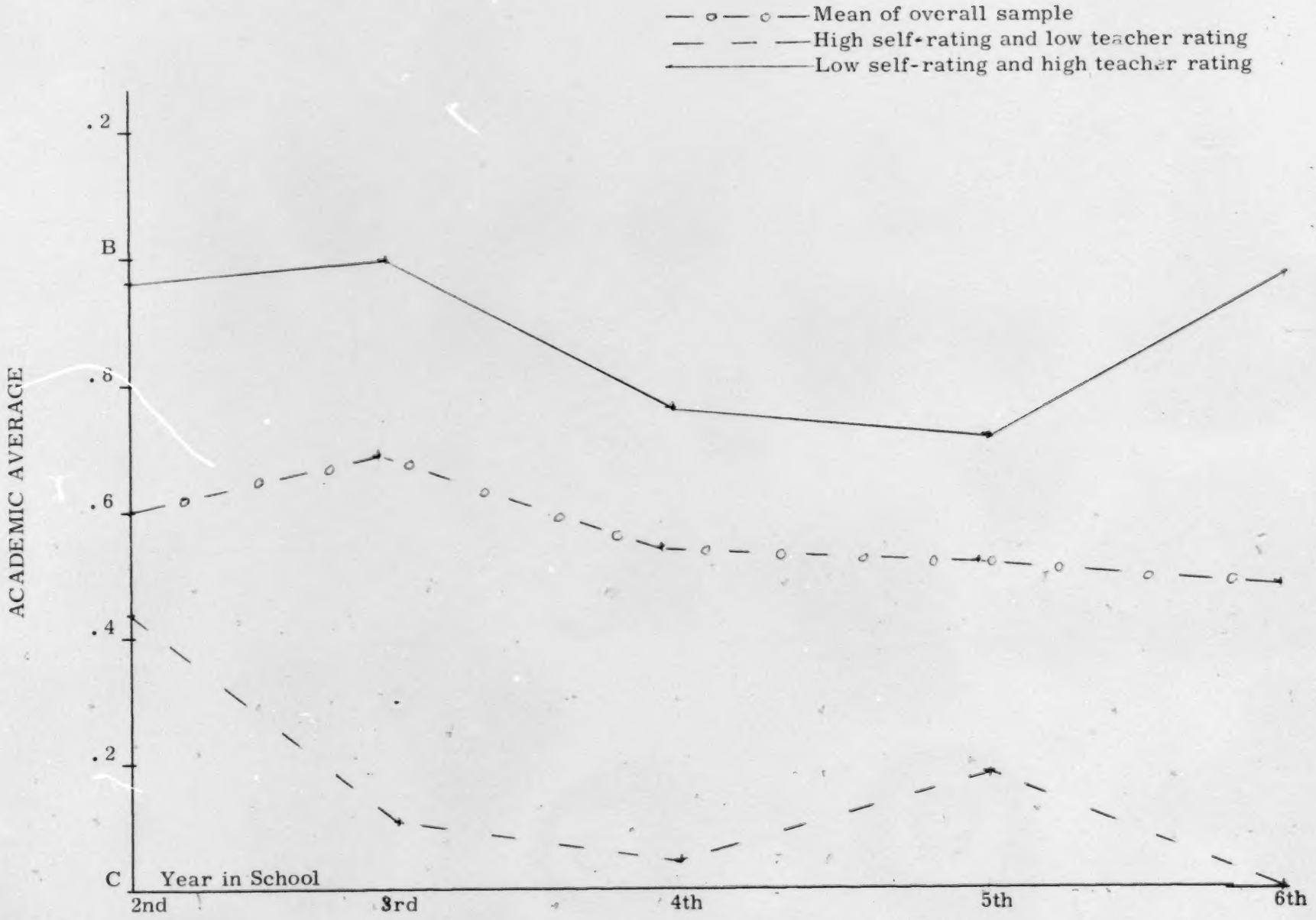

ILLUSTRATION 4· AVERAGE ACADEMIC MARKS FOR DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN RATING OF CHILD BY TEACHER AND SELF

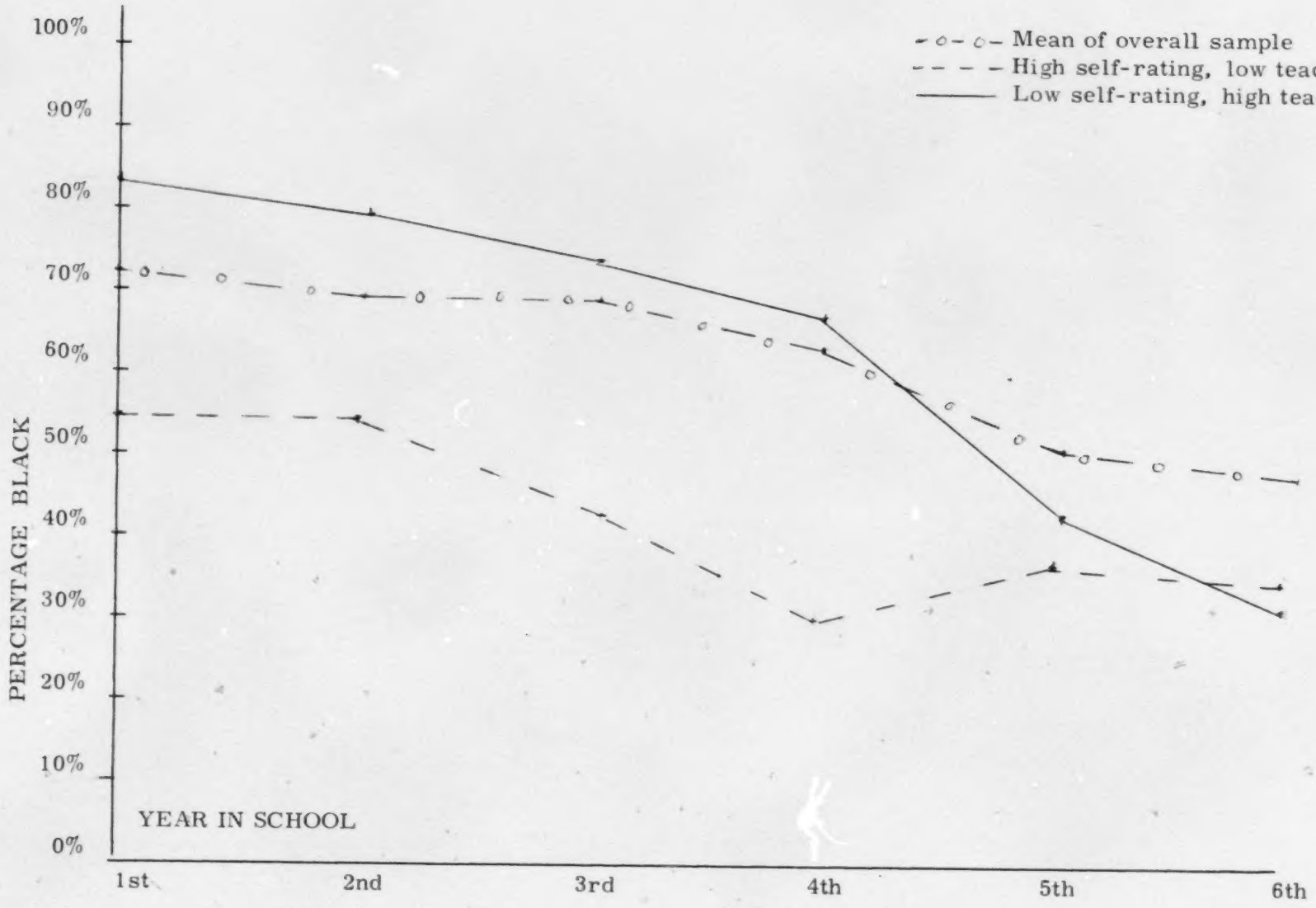

ILLUSTRATION 5: SCHOOL PERCENTAGE BLACK FOR DISAGREEMENT IN RATINGS OF CHILD BY TEACHER AND SELF

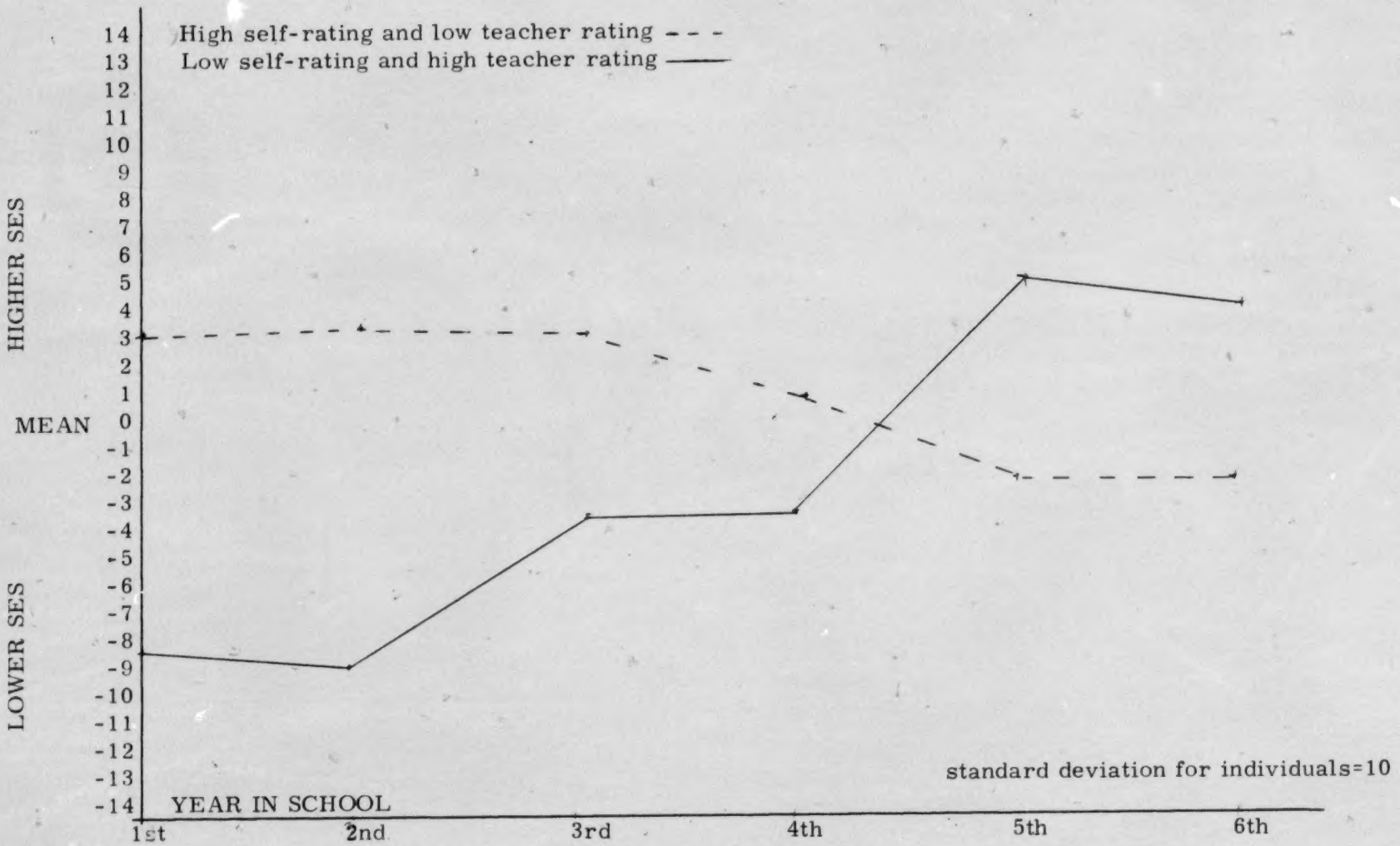

ILLUSTRATION 6: AVERAGE SCHOOL SES FOR EACH GROUP OF DEVIANT CASE RATINGS

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